

FACT FLASH

10: Superfund Community Involvement Program

Community involvement is essential in all Superfund actions taken by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), since the Superfund program is based on the public's rights and concerns in maintaining a safe, healthy environment. Community participation in the Superfund process ensures that citizen concerns are identified and met and that the public is involved in the decisions that affect their health and well-being. Sometimes citizens help decide how contaminated sites will be used after they are cleaned up.

EPA's community involvement program promotes open communication among everyone involved in, or affected by, the Superfund process. The goal is to build trust, to focus on real problems, and to find workable solutions. When the public is actively involved, better cleanup decisions are made and the cleanup process is better understood.

What is community involvement?

Formal community involvement in the cleanup process at a site starts when EPA assigns a community involvement coordinator to the Superfund site. These coordinators facilitate communications and activities so that the public can participate in Superfund decisions that affect their communities. Coordinators have three goals for involving the community:

- Keep the public informed about everything that's going on – what the problems are, what the health risks are, how progress is being made, and any other issues related to the site.
- Give people the chance to provide feedback on decisions.
- Identify and resolve conflicts, keeping the dialogue constructive.



For each Superfund site, the following building blocks for public participation are required:

- Community Relations Plan (CRP)
- Information repositories/administrative record
- Explanation of planned response and cleanup activities
- Technical Assistance Grants (TAGs)
- Public comment periods
- Response to comments
- Remedial design fact sheet.

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Community Relations Plan

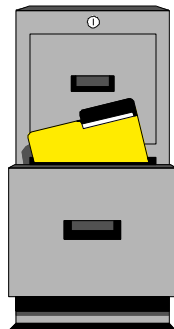
A site-specific Community Relations Plan guides EPA's community involvement efforts during a site cleanup. This plan describes various ways to encourage effective communication between the community and EPA; identifies where the public can attend meetings and find information about the site; describes the site; lists how the community has been involved in the past; and talks about public concerns and interests. It also describes the community involvement activities that will be scheduled. The plan helps both the community and EPA by discussing past events and current concerns.

Technical Assistance Grants (TAGs)

TAGs are \$50,000 grants made available to qualified groups of citizens affected by hazardous waste. Grants are given to community groups so they can hire technical advisors who can help explain technical information about a site, or obtain training, supplies, and equipment. Groups eligible to receive this grant money include citizens' associations and environmental or health advocacy organizations.

Information Repository

For each Superfund site EPA creates an information center, called an information repository, that the public can easily use. Typically it is located in a library or town hall. Documents in the repository include site work plans, the Community Relations Plan, investigation studies, a health assessment, the proposed plan for cleaning up the site,



sampling reports, fact sheets, and other materials related to the site.

Administrative Record

The administrative record is a file that has all of the technical documents related to the site cleanup, as well as all the public's comments. A copy of the administrative record is kept in the information repository so the public can review it.

Proposed Plan

EPA prepares a proposed plan that discusses what studies have been done at the site, what cleanup options there are, and which cleanup method EPA prefers.

Fact Sheets

EPA distributes a fact sheet that describes the proposed plan and publishes a notice in the newspaper telling people about how they can review it and give input.

Before EPA picks a cleanup remedy, community members can attend a meeting to discuss the plan and give their comments. Citizens have at least 30 days to review and comment on the plan. Public meetings give community members a chance to ask questions or express their opinions and concerns about a proposed remedy.

Responsiveness Summary

At the end of the public comment period, EPA summarizes all questions and comments it received from the public and its response to these comments. This summary, called the responsiveness summary, is included in EPA's Record of Decision (ROD) for the site.

If, as a result of public input, EPA makes a big change in which cleanup method it chooses, it publishes a revised proposed plan to explain the change and either extends or renews the public comment period. EPA then publishes a notice that tells the public which remedy has been selected in the ROD and where they can read the ROD for more details.

Remedial Design Fact Sheet

Once it selects a remedy, EPA distributes a remedial design fact sheet that explains the technology used to cleanup the site.

What else does EPA do to involve community?

EPA always gets community input when it proposes to add or delete a site from the list of the nation's worst hazardous waste sites, or to include a site in a special research project. EPA also does many other things to make sure the community can get involved and stay informed, including:

- Produce fact sheets, newsletters, or brochures to give more information about a site or to warn residents about potential health threats, such as eating fish from a contaminated river or lake
- Teach children about Superfund sites and their dangers
- Operate a telephone hotline to answer questions
- Inform the news media about site activities and plans



- Show videos about site activities to community residents and groups
- Help citizens form working groups to influence site decisions
- Conduct site tours and hold open houses so people can learn more about the cleanup process
- Make presentations to local groups and officials about site activities
- Build observation decks so people can watch what's happening at a site
- Conduct door-to-door interviews to collect or share information.

Community Advisory Groups (CAGs)

are another way to promote community involvement. CAGs help people, especially low-income and minority groups, participate in the decision making process at Superfund sites. CAGs help communities get recognition, training, guidance, and other support that will help them work with EPA.

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Another program is **Technical Outreach Services for Communities (TOSC)**. It offers assistance to communities affected by hazardous waste substances but that don't have a TAG. TOSC provides technical information and guidance through relationships with 23 universities across the nation.

What are the benefits of community involvement?

Better cleanup decisions are often made when the public is involved, and the community understands the cleanup process better if they participate. At several sites citizen involvement has changed Superfund cleanups. For example, at a site in New England EPA proposed to clean up contaminated soil by burning it in an incinerator. But the community opposed the remedy and rallied the support of others in the state. Because of their efforts, EPA changed the cleanup remedy. In Montana, community residents wanted to turn part of a Superfund site into a golf course. EPA listened to what the community wanted and worked with everyone involved – as a result, the golf course will be built within the next few years when cleanup is complete.

What can you do to get involved?

To get involved in making decisions about a Superfund site in your community, you can:

- Contact your Community Involvement Coordinator (CIC) and let them know you want to find out more about the site, and ask how you can help



- Call the RCRA, Superfund, and EPCRA Hotline for public materials at 1-800-424-9346
- Start a CAG
- Visit the Site's Information Repository
- Apply for a TAG
- Attend public meetings
- Surf the Internet
- Become involved with environmental groups in your area
- Ask your CIC to give a presentation/workshop to your community
- Ask your CIC for the TOSC nearest you
- Let EPA know what you think through letters
- Tell others about what you are doing and how they can help.